

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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----- 110438  
R 241719Z OCT 74  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2130

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6167

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EXDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1  
TAGS: PN, PFOR  
SUBJ: ADVISORY GROUP FOR CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

REF: PANAMA 5464

SUMMARY. TORRIJOS HAS APPOINTED A GROUP REPORTEDLY TO OVERSEE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. WHILE ITS MEMBERS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE LEFTISTS, THEY ARE ALSO BELIEVED TO BE PRAGMATIC MEN, SOME OF WHOM ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE ACCUMULATED WEALTH DURING THEIR GOVERNMENT SERVICE. END SUMMARY.

1. TORRIJOS APPOINTED, SOMETIME IN SEPTEMBER, A COMMITTEE TO WORK SECRETLY ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEE IS VICE PRESIDENT ARTURO SUCRE; MARCELINO JAEN, PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION (NLC), AND TORRIJOS' BROTHER-IN-LAW; FOREIGN MINISTER TACK; AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA; ADOLFO AHUMADA, NLC MEMBER; MANUEL BALBINO MORENO, NLC MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL SUPPLY COMMISSION; AND ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA'S RECTOR.

2. EMBASSY SOURCE, WHO LEARNED OF GROUP FROM PRESIDENT LAKAS, SAID HE HAD EXPRESSED SURPRISE TO LAKAS BECAUSE, WITH EXCEPTIONS OF TACK, GONZALEZ REVILLA AND ESCOBAR, NONE OF OTHERS HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE ON CANAL ISSUE. MOREOVER, THEY WERE LEFTISTS. LAKAS HAD RESPONDED THAT THESE MEN HAD BEEN IMPROVING THEIR  
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PERSONAL FINANCIAL STATUS, IMPLYING THEREBY, ACCORDING TO SOURCE,

THAT THEY WOULD NOT DO ANYTHING WILD. THE PURPOSE OF APPOINTING THE GROUP WAS TO SPEED UP NEGOTIATIONS AND REDUCE FOREIGN MINISTER TACK'S ROLE.

3. COMMENT: JAEN AND AHUMADA ESPECIALLY ARE ALREADY OVERBURDENED WITH THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES ON NLC AND OTHER AD HOC TASKS TORRIJOS CONSTANTLY IS LEVYING UPON THEM. IT WOULD NOT APPEAR, THEREFORE, THAT THIS GROUP WILL BE DOING MUCH OF THE NITTY-GRITTY WORK ON POSITION PAPERS. WE SUSPECT THEIR ROLE WILL BE PRIMARILY IN EVALUATING FROM A POLITICAL STANDPOINT U.S. PLV-POSALS AND POSITION PAPERS PREPARED BY PANAMA'S NEGOTIATORS. TORRIJOS' RATIONALE IN PICKING THESE INDIVIDUALS MAY BE THAT, DESPITE THEIR IMAGES AS LEFTISTS, THEY ARE PRACTICAL MEN WHO HAVE BENEFITED PERSONALLY FROM THEIR OFFICIAL POSITIONS AND WOULD NOT BE INCLINED TO GIVE HIM DIFFICULTIES OVER MATTERS OF PRINCIPLE IN A TREATY. JAEN AND AHUMADA ESPECIALLY ARE REPORTEDLY TRUSTED BY TORRIJOS AND HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES TO BE CAPABLE POLITICIAN AND DILIGENT WORKERS. A POSSIBLE EXCEPTION COULD BE SUCRE, WHO REPORTEDLY IS DISTRUSTED BY PRESIDENT LAKAS. SOME EMBASSY CONTACTS ALLEGE HE MAY BE SECRET MEMBER OF COMMUNIST PARTY. ON OTHER HAND, HE IS ALSO COMPROMISED SOMEWHAT BY HIS FINANCIAL INTERESTS AND RUMORS THAT HE HAS RECEIVED KICKBACKS FROM BUSINESS FIRMS IN RETURN FOR FAVORS. BECAUSE OF THIS TORRIJOS PROBABLY FEELS HE CAN CONTROL SUCRE. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER TORRIJOS CAN CONTROL THEM, THE LEFTIST ORIENTATION OF THESE MEN AND THEIR LACK OF DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE U.S. IS NOT ENCOURAGING. THEY COULD, THROUGH MISINTERPRETATION -- DELIBERATE OR INADVERTENT -- CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR U.S.

JORDEN

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## Message Attributes

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